DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 286 850 SP 029 387

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TITLE Athletes in Motion: Training for the Olympic Games with Mind and Body: Two Case Studies.
INSTITUTION Integrated Research Services, Eugene, OR.
PUB DATE Jun 86
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the International Conference on Mental Health and Technology (Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, June 8-13, 1986).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Athletes; Case Studies; *Competition; *Psychomotor Skills; Relaxation Training; *Skill Development; *Sport Psychology; *Training Methods

ABSTRACT

Two case studies illustrate the Fine-Tuning Effect and its benefit to participants in athletic competition. The Fine-Tuning Effect is the sharpening of psychological processes that enable physical skills to be expressed in a maximum fashion. Such techniques as muscle relaxation, visual imagery, guided fantasy, autogenic training, and meditation have been used to achieve results. Positive Replacement Imagery was also used to help athletes maintain relaxation during competition but retain complete focus and concentration on mind/body interaction. These two cases help define the relationship between the sports psychologist and the athlete. (CB)

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TRAINING FOR THE OLYMPIC GAMES WITH MINDS AND BODY:

TWO CASE STUDIES

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ATHLETES IN MOTION:

TRAINING FOR THE OLYMPIC GAMES WITH MIND AND BODY: TWO CASE STUDIES

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"The difference in performance among athletes of relatively equivalent skills appears to rest on a person's ability to cope with perceived stress of the competitive situation" (Wenz & Strong,1979).

Taken from an abstract of research by Drs. Donald Strong and Betty Wenz, sports psychologists at California State Hayward, these words categorize an emerging concept in competitive sports, The Fine Tuning Effect (Wenz,1979). For years a number of coaches have tried to catch up with the regimented mind/body techniques of Eastern Bloc nations. Sport psychology has attempted to integrate the fine physiological specimen with a positive attitude and a clear mind; preparing the athlete for ultimate performance. Simply stated, The Fine Tuning Effect is the sharpening of psychological processes that enable the physical skills to be expressed in a maximum fashion (Wenz & Strong,1977). Psychologists and coaches have employed muscle relaxation, visual imagery, guided fantasy, autogenic training, and meditation to achieve the finely tuned results. Each technique has its place in the eclectic and behavioral approaches to psychotherapy; steeped in a tradition of alleviating stress, reducing muscle tension and improving our ability

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to cope with stressful situations. As Wenz and Strong note in their research, "There appears to be little variability in physical capabilities among superior athletes, and the differences that do exist are sometimes not effectively utilized. Often it is the psychological response of the athlete that makes the real difference between success and failure in competition" (Wenz & Strong, 1979, Brown,1977).

What follows are two case studies involving Olympic track and field athletes. The author who worked with both athletes used the fundamental concepts of "Fine-Tuning" and in addition developed a unique implementation. The relationship between a sports psychologist and athlete is a delicate balance, often not clearly defined. These cases will define that relationship and highlight the following: A-a refined training procedure, B-access to information, C-a better understanding of athlete/therapist collaboration.

CASE STUDY ONE:

During the 12 months prior to the Olympic Trials (June 1984), a world class track and field athlete entered therapy with the complaint that irritability, fatigue, and sleeplessness seemed to dominate a major portion of his time. This athlete, who just missed making the 1980 Olympic Team, had come off a very succesful World Cup circuit in the summer of 1983. Returning from Europe, several minor injuries plagued his fall training. By winter, an intense training schedule left his mind and body drained with very little enthusiasm for the upcoming

summer games. In our sessions, this athlete commented about how good he felt throughout the first two-thirds of his races. "I continue to see other athletes passing me during the final lap. My legs hurt and I'm afraid I just won't finish." Throughout our sessions, other comments pertaining to images and negative self-thoughts were introduced as explanations for poor performance.

PRIMARY INTERVENTION:

Using the statement "I continue to see," offered an important clue to our intervention. This athlete did in fact visualize and used a number of images during his races. Upon discovering that images and visualizations could be used both as postive and negative influences, a new approach to training began. To initiate the visualization process we began with a simple exercise of deep breathing in a very relaxed postion (Brown,1977). After reaching a degree of comfort and proficiency with deep muscle relaxation (Jacobson technique), I suggested a specific race in Europe that we might image together. As the athlete led, we created a clear picture of the stadium, track, weather conditions, and other athletes. As we moved into the event, I asked the athlete to report his feelings, as well as scale (1-10) his anxiety level. As his sweaty palms, muscle twitch, and tight abdomen offered evidence of successful imagery, I suggested deeper muscle relaxation; tightening and loosening those areas under distress.

After several sessions of succesful deep muscle relaxation followed by directed imagery to specific events, our next step was "Positive Replacement Imagery." Directing himself into a specific competition in

Europe, I asked the athlete to "run" us both through the entire race. Using laps as indicators and stress points, he approached the last lap with a high level of anxiety and negative imagery. As the anxiety heightened, I suggested deeper states of muscle relaxation, paying close attention to body parts that seemed most vulnerable. Often this athlete noted that he wasn't sure if it was anxiety or fatigue that "let him down." As we neared the last lap, I suggested that he report on his images (Frew,1974).

Often, such distractions as other athletes, weather, or crowds presented a negative picture. At the point of experiencing a negative image, I presented an intervention cue. Using the phrases "while I run this race I will feel strong and confident" and "I will energize my body using the the energy of the crowd and other athletes to enhance my performance", we began our Positive Replacement Imagery. This athlete then began intoducing new images and replacing the "old negative ones" during crucial moments in the race (Wolpe,1971). During the Positive Replacement Imagery, a number of visuals would actually be moved off the mental picture screen and new, positive images would emerge. The timing of replacement became critical and of course required much rehearsal. It was mutually decided that warm-ups and stretching would create a good rehearsal time. The amount of practice time seemed to be in direct proportion to the ease in which imaging was accessible. The athlete was instructed to practice this procedure on his own for the next ten weeks.

CASE STUDY TWO

A second athlete entered therapy some ten months prior to the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles. This competitor made the 1980 team, but of course was not permitted to compete because of the U.S. boycott. His chief complaint was lack of motivation and very little incentive to compete well. For the past six years, he was seeded number two in his event; however during several trials he would choose not to win--intentionally falling to second or third place. Many of his distractions were personal problems at home; which he felt would "just go away" if he worked out hard enough (Goleman & Schwartz,1976). His loss of concentration and distraction came during major competition. This athlete would recall his parents commenting, "you're not working hard enough" and his coach saying, "you'll never make the team." He often complained of not "really being present." His mind would wander to conversations about his performance, at which point he would lose his focus, reduce his concentration, and lose the edge. Over and over this particular set of circumstances seemed to pervade his imagery and auditory senses during critical moments in competition.

PRIMARY INTERVENTION

This particular athlete learned imagery very quickly. Muscle relaxation was not threatening and total body awareness was quick and smooth (Banquet,1973). A new dimension to Positive Replacement Imagery was now implemented. As this individual heard negative and counter-productive chatter; creating the image was only one

part of the replacement strategy. After successful progressive relaxation, I suggested a series of places where supportive voices might be heard. These included a girlfriend, brother, and former teacher. I suggested that rehearsal of positive talk be a part of stretching and warm-ups; such that it became an integral aspect of the training routine.

Over several sessions, a number of directed visualizations was learned. These visuals emerged during various competitions where previous (negative) self-talk challenged this competitor. This athlete went to the event with a new set of images as well as new auditory statements. These included, "I'm so tired of pleasing others...this one is for me." And "I'm good and can even improve to meet my own expectations." In addition to examining the "pleaser personality type" the use of Positive Replacement of auditory statements was successful in lending a fresh perspective on training and competition.

SUMMARY

In both cases, a clear intervention strategy emerged. In addition to the "Fine-Tuning Effect", Positive Replacement Imagery was employed. Throughout the year, a definition of psychophysiological intervention was enhaced. Together we developed a strategy for maintaining total relaxation during a race; yet with complete focus and concentration on the the mind/body interaction. This is indeed a major component of the "Fine-Tuning Effect" with the emphasis on collaboration between therapist and athlete (Wenz & Strong,1979). What seems imperative is the generalization effect or moving the experience from the

office into the real world. The next step was to insure success over time.

Each athlete agreed to create a specific outline of the technical aspects of his competition, (i.e., times, splits, pacing, placement, and the final kick) From this one page outline, we articluated the strengths, weaknesses and improved motions of the body. We defined the movements that enhanced confidence and discouraged those that did not. We approached weak motion with the attitude, "these movements will be the turning point of my race; forward into the challenge!" From the outline we created an audio cassette tape which the athlete could use in his car or home for practice. The tape included the outline; seven to ten minutes of generalized body relaxation, and a summary statment of body awareness. Here is the design of our collaborative work together:

-5 to 7 minutes of deep breathing in a comfortable position followed by a session of progressive muscle relaxation.

-After deep physiological relaxation is achieved, the next 10 minutes incorporate visual imagery prepared in conjunction with technical aspects of the race.

-after the imagery is achieved, a series of Positive Replacement Images are brought on the mental screen.

-finally after the new images and autogenic statments made, a final relaxation segment is taped. This is a 5 minute summary statement of positive imagery. ("I can see myself running smoothly") and creative visualization, ("I sense new confidence in my final lap.")

The summary brought together relaxation of mind and body and finely tuned athletic movement. In addition, several statements defining lap

time and goal setting (new personal record) were constructed in the segment (Blanchard & Young,1974).

CONCLUSION

The "Fine-Tuning Effect" (Wenz & Strong,1979), is a construct which both world class athlete and the recreational competitor can use. Some athletes report euphoric states while running long distances. Others build structures from the foundation framing, on up to the roof. It appears that the finely tuned athlete wants both: A full awareness of body strain and yet an ability to leave that awareness at the appropriate moment. It is the same athlete who wants full awareness of his competitors (side by side) and yet has the ability to escape that awareness at special moments. What seems to emerge in a therapeutic interaction of sports psychologist and superior athlete is a synthesis of creative energy, discipline, and motivation (Suinn,1972).

As the therapist becomes more aware of factors interfering with the performance situation, a clearly defined program must be initiated. After a program is defined and before implementation, the therapist/athlete relationship moves through delicate territory. The athlete must define his goals and specifically take responsibility for realistic expectiations of training, improvements, and success in competition. At this point, implementation of a specific program designed to enhance performance goals of the athlete is needed. Implementation might suggest experimentation, practice, and trial and error. No one program works for all athletes.

Finally, the collaboration of creating an outline followed by training tape is a joint venture that appears to have special significance for the purpose of refining the "Fine-Tuning Effect" (Wenz & Strong, 1979). An additional component of this effect could be the use of "Positive Replacement Imagery." As research uncovers more data revealing the inner workings of mind/body relationship, we will continue to marvel at the creative process that athletes use in striving for their ultimate performance.

Steven Ungerleider PhD, is a Psychologist and Director of Integrated Research Services in Eugene,Oregon. In addition to private practice and consulting, Ungerleider serves on the United States Olympic Committee's Sport Psychology Registry which assists Olympic hopefuls.

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Abstract

The author discusses the Fine-Tuning Effect and its benefit to the enhancement of athletic competition. Two case studies are presented that offer a specific program of visualization, creative imagery, and relaxation techniques. The author provides a three step program; refined training procedure, access to information, and a better understanding of athlete/therapist collaboration. Additionally, a new concept, Positive Replacement Imagery is introduced as an adjunct to the Fine Tuning Effect.